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Berlin Not for Sale: The Film Lens as a Tool of Urban Exploration in 1960s West Berlin

Dr Laura Bowie

Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, Cardiff, United Kingdom

BowieL@Cardiff.ac.uk; +447793451752; Bute Building, Room 1.35, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3NB, Wales, UK; Work Phone: +44 29225 10976

Laura Bowie is a lecturer in Architectural History and Theory at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University. Her research interests include: the city and protest, the radicalisation of urban space, the relationship between urban planning and the psyche, and the use of memory and cultural outputs as exploratory tools.

Geolocation Information: West Berlin: N 52° 32' 0" E 13° 10' 0"

Twitter: @DrLauraBowie

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/drlaurabowie

ORCID Identifier: 0000-0002-9084-2142

Abstract

West Berlin, a city emblematic of a fractured post-war society, provided the basis for the volatile student protests of 1968 where the youth sought to reclaim the city from its prescribed path. This article identifies the film camera as a probing tool of urban exploration during the 1960s through the films of Irena Vrkljan (1930-). As an outsider in the city, Vrkljan built on the work of many intellectuals in Berlin compelled by their urban experience to explore the connection between city and dweller. In contrast to the image of the 1960s as a period of upheaval, Vrkljan's films offer a historically conscious, and lyrical approach to the city that discover alternative pasts and potential futures. Armed with a 16mm camera and the writings of Kracauer and Simmel, an alternative West Berlin is uncovered where, in the words of Vrkljan, "it is possible to penetrate the fabric of the city".

Keywords: film; 1960s; urban space; identity; West Berlin

Introduction



Figure 1: "Emergency - Strike", Deutschlandhaus, dffb, West Berlin, May 1968 © Ullstein / TopFoto, 2020

West Berlin, May 20th, 1968, on the edge of Theodor-Heuss Platz in Charlottenburg, a red flag hangs from the top floor of the *Deutschlandhaus* building, home to the Film and Television Academy (dffb) (Fig. 1). In archetypal agitation rhetoric, *Der Spiegel* reported that the students had "'socialized' their 'means of production'".¹ For fear of association, the public radio and television company (SFB) who occupied the rooms below, hung various colored flags out of their own windows in order to "neutralize" the red.² Inside the building, a film

camera follows a student of the inaugural class, Thomas Mitscherlich, as he renames the academy after revolutionary Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1896-1954); etching “Dziga Wertow Akademie” on to the classroom wall (Fig. 2). The academy was now occupied in protest against the passing of the *Notstandsgesetze* [Emergency Laws] and to commemorate the revolutionary documentary legacy of Dziga Vertov.³ According to film critic Fabian Tietke, Vertov was seen as a politically straight-line counterpoint to the “romantic” film theorist Sergei Eisenstein.⁴ The political engagement of the early dffb students is further indicated in their participation and filming of many demonstrations in the city. The dffb did not follow the common division of alternative post-war film into either avant-garde aesthetics or political thematics but instead actively combined the two. As dffb student Thomas Giefer stated: “an honest film must necessarily take part in political action.”⁵ The eighteen students involved in the ten-day occupation ended with the police clearing the building and the expulsion of the students. However, not to be deterred, the students continued their politically motivated film work in the districts of Berlin with various under-represented sectors of society.



Figure 2: Still from *Wochenschau II* (West Berlin: dffb, 1969) © DFFB, 2020

The dffb, therefore, occupied a central place, not only in the island of what was West Berlin but also in the political activities of the developing student movement. A city that was once the capital and center of a powerful nation, now detached from the rest of its country and occupied by the Allies, became a magnet for the youth attracted to new and alternative lifestyles. West Berlin thus became a place of altered and fragmented identity, with its heightened juxtaposition of demolition and reconstruction, commercialism and the unconventional. Through planning, urban space in the city directly connected attempts to overcome the National Socialist past and forge a new “democratic” identity in the post-fascist era. This saw the large-scale implementation of concepts from CIAM’s Athens Charter with the separation of functions and the displacement of tenants from nineteenth-century tenements in the city center, to new modernist satellite settlements erected on the outskirts of the city.⁶ This combination of urban planning policies and social rupture caused the urban environment to become a battleground for an assertion of the new generation’s “right to the city.”

This analysis will focus on the little-explored film work of the writer, translator and director Irena Vrkljan (born in Belgrade in 1930), who was amongst the first cohort of thirty-five students to attend the newly founded *Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin* [German Film and Television Academy Berlin or dffb] in West Berlin in 1966. The first cohort also included several students who later became well-known German filmmakers: Hartmut Bitomsky, Harun Farocki, Wolf Gremm, Holger Meins, Wolfgang Petersen, Helke Sander, Max Willutzki, and Christian Ziewer. In her 1988 novel *Marina, im Gegenlicht* [translated as *Marina, or about biography*], Vrkljan recalled her time at the dffb:

Berlin 1966. The film academy in Pommernallee. I was thirty-six. [...] The Film Academy was the strangest place in my life. The corridors with neon light, shiny, cold linoleum, the young people bossy, spoiled, sexless. The madness of film, the hurried life in pictures. But we didn't create it, the other reality, we ate dry bread rolls during the film screenings, hung flags out of the window at random, questions were shouted down, many buried themselves in politics. The three years of study ran down my back like a cold trail. The heart shrinks, the eyes stare at the projection screen like lidless holes. The course on entertainment films from the Third Reich destroyed the last possibilities of a belief in new pictures. [...] I soon no longer had any partners for discussions and pulled myself back into the books.⁷

Here we receive a bleak sense of Vrkljan's isolation at the academy, her view of the almost senseless involvement in politics, the passive mass consumption of film, and the shadow of National Socialism. For Vrkljan, books were her savior from this "strange" context and returned her into the world she was seeking to understand through her films and novels.

This analysis will therefore demonstrate how Vrkljan's approach to film contrasted with the work of her fellow students. Vrkljan chose to explore the spaces and multiple histories in the city as a means of critique and identity-creation, rather than focus on revolutionary rhetoric and political action. Her short film *Berlin unverkäuflich* [Berlin Not for Sale] (1967), which will be the focus of this analysis, exemplifies her approach to urban exploration through the city's past.

The undirected, detached exploration of the city, reading streets, facades, and actions of the city-dweller as signifiers of the contemporary condition are activities of "flânerie" as defined by Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, Franz Hessel, and others during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The writer Lauren Elkin has recently

reconceptualized the term traditionally associated with upper-middle-class men to include the experience of women city-dwellers through her imaginary definition of the “Flâneuse”: “[*flanne-euhze*], noun, from the French. Feminine form of flâneur [*flanne-euhr*], an idler, a dawdling observer, usually found in cities.”⁸ The flâneuse, Elkin argues, is not simply a female flaneur but is an independent force to be reckoned with, who confronts how “words like home and belonging are used against women”.⁹ As an “outsider” in the city, this analysis will show how Vrkljan combined the tools of the flâneuse, an interest in the tangible and intangible transformation of the city, alongside the political and aesthetic shift in filmmaking during the 1960s.

As the city at the focus of many key events of the twentieth century, film footage of Berlin in destruction and construction came to be emblematic of global traumas and tensions. In the 1920s and 1930s, over ninety percent of all German films were produced in Berlin. This was not solely due to the density of film production but also because, as highlighted by German scholar Frank Stucke, the city itself offered an “inexhaustible reservoir of moving stories.”¹⁰ This reservoir was intensely politicized in the 1960s, with the declaration of the Oberhausen Film Manifesto in 1962 that “*Papas Kino ist tot*” [Papa’s cinema is dead], which announced new attitudes in German film-making that coincided with the politicization of the youth. The critique of the younger generation was embedded in wider concerns of the ’68 movement who saw the alteration of the city as a physical manifestation of authoritarianism and the values of the capitalist system. This was also reflected in the critique of the film industry as being creatively, aesthetically, and economically desolate.

Importantly, the films made at the dffb were not mediated by funders or commissions, which allowed its students a free and relatively unrestrained artistic dialogue with the city. The films would only be viewed by examiners, and whilst in some cases, this might cause students to temper their outputs, the academy had a particularly politically active student body almost as soon as it opened. For example, in December of 1967 just over a year after West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt opened the dffb, Hartmut Bitomsky, Gerd Conradt, Harun Farocki, and Holger Meins, along with film students from Ulm, attended the fourth *expmntl*

film festival in Knokke, Belgium which included the most important experimental filmmakers at the time. According to film historian Xavier Garcia Bardon, the “political aphasia” on display compelled the students into action; demonstrations and disruptions ensued with shouts of “reality!” and “awareness!”.¹¹ This was just one aspect of wider dissatisfaction; the politically committed students among the first cohort at the dffb were in permanent conflict with the administration of the film academy from their first semester, which was not only noted by the Berlin Senate but also by the Bonn Ministry of the Interior, and almost led to the closure of the dffb.¹²

Films produced at the academy during the early years exemplify the desire for political engagement and vary from, for example, Sander’s *Brecht die Macht der Manipulateure* [Break the Power of the Manipulators] (1967/8), which was concerned with the manipulation of the masses by the right-wing Springer Press, Harun Farocki’s *Die Worte des Vorsitzenden* [The Words of the Chairman] (1967), which shows paper airplanes constructed from pages of the “Mao Bible”, directed at a figure with the facial features of the Shah of Persia, ultimately killing him. Perhaps most infamously, Holger Meins’s *Wie baue ich einen Molotow-Cocktail?* [How to Produce a Molotov Cocktail?] (1968), which has never officially been attributed to the director was shown at teach-ins and gatherings of the infamous *Kommune Eins*. These films, and Meins’s in particular, directly contributed to the turning point in the wider ’68 movement towards revolutionary violence, and are all the more poignant as Meins later became a member of the RAF terrorist organization, and died on hunger strike in prison in 1974.

The significance of the films of the early dffb students has generally been worked into larger histories of the film school, with very little scholarship in the English language aside from recent work by Christina Gerhardt who has highlighted the significance of the early years at the academy.¹³ Publications in German generally focus on the wider development of New German Cinema or consider the place of the dffb in the escalation towards terrorism in the 1970s.¹⁴ This is partly because most of the early films which have survived are available only in the archives and in 16mm. However, the gradual appearance of some of

these films online through the digitization work of the dffb has increased accessibility and allowed the early work at the academy to slowly integrate into discussions.

Limited considerations of Vrkljan's contribution focus on *Faroghi dreht* [Faroghi Shoots] (1967), which shows the young director Harun Farocki working on a film, or in general analyses of the work of the female students. In a brief consideration of Vrkljan's contribution, Tietke commented that her films are "thoughtful" and "equidistant from the two poles of the argument," which are identified as the agitation films of her classmates and the observational documentary style of the dffb lecturer Klaus Wildenhahn.¹⁵ When Vrkljan does include shots of protest, as in her final film *Berlin* (1969), Tietke commented that the scenes are "filmed from a very benevolent perspective, they remain on the outside and do not enter into the crowd. A quiet film in a noisy time."¹⁶ Why did Vrkljan choose to remain on the outside as the quiet observer? And what insight can this provide into a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between urban space and film production in West Berlin during the 1960s?

This analysis argues that Vrkljan's films complicate the general understanding of the "global sixties" as a largely homogenous phenomenon focused on revolution versus reform or politics versus aesthetics. Vrkljan's approach provides an alternative understanding of the spaces of post-war West Berlin as imbued with lost voices and lost (hi)stories, rather than the streets as places of protest in the immediate present. Whilst social upheaval and the rediscovery of the political potential of the film camera was a shared basis for the work of the early dffb students, these influences were evaluated differently by individuals at the academy. For many, film's role in the incitement towards violence, or in exposing the lived reality of marginalized sectors of society corresponded to the outwardly radical nature of the '68 movement. However, owing to her background as an author and translator, her immigrant status in the city, and her interest in the past as constructed, Vrkljan conceptualized an interpretation of politics and aesthetics independent of her fellow students. Vrkljan fostered a less forceful relationship with the city, through which she examined her own identity and the identity of the fractured city.

Films as a Means of Urban Exploration

During the 1960s, film was reconceived as an explorative tool to analyze phenomena that were imperceptible to the human eye, influenced most notably by the writings of the revolutionary Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov. The importance of the ideas and concepts of Vertov is clear in the student occupation of the dffb and its renaming as the “Dziga Vertov Academy”. As well as this, placards displayed by the young filmmakers at the Belgium Exprmntl film festival read “Long live Dziga Vertov”.¹⁷ Vertov’s key concept was the *Kino-glaz* [cinema-eye]: “My [the Kino-Eye’s] path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you.”¹⁸ The appeal of the revolutionary rhetoric is self-evident and also succinctly demonstrates how the film lens was understood as a means to expose an unrecognized reality. This was coupled with a consideration of the active and independent role that film could play in engendering revolutionary change in society.

Another key theorist to the '68 filmmakers was Siegfried Kracauer, sociologist and architect by trade, who stated in 1932 that “the film critic of note is conceivable only as a social critic,” and this became the motto for young practitioners of film during the 1960s.¹⁹ Of significance, to Kracauer and other key voices of the sixties, was the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines as well as a clear commitment to social engagement and change. Often, images of the '68 movement are intrinsically embedded in their urban context and this is reflected in the work of the theorists that informed the attitudes of '68ers. As noted by sociologist David Frisby, Kracauer “singles out the street and the masses as preconditions for the continued existence of the flâneur/se in the context of the new technology of film,”²⁰ thus directly connecting the significance of film to the engaged city-dweller. Influenced by the sociologist Georg Simmel, connections can be found between Kracauer’s arguments and Simmel’s concern with the impact of the modern city on the psyche of its inhabitants and their everyday experience of urban space.²¹ Writing in the early 1900s, this concern led Simmel to the development of the concept of the “blasé personality”; a city-dweller who experienced the urban as “homogenous, flat, and gray.”²² In the post-war

period, the relationship between the psyche and urban space was increasingly investigated as the ruined city was seen as a physical reflection of a psychologically devastated society. The connection, therefore, between the tangible and the intangible was made manifest in images of the urban environment. In 1960 Kracauer wrote:

film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavoring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmentized. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality.²³

Thus, the role of film was in its ability to assert a sense of agency that could instigate a new awareness of the world. The sociologist Graham Gilloch explained that for Kracauer “the city is haunted by the alienated modern condition itself,” by emptiness, loneliness, the absence of social solidarity, and the “evacuation of meaning and hope.”²⁴ The activities of ‘68ers influenced by these theories and operating within the spaces of the city can be understood as an attempt to counteract the modern condition of urban existence by uncovering the real.

It can, therefore, be argued that the film camera was appropriated as a tool of the flâneur/se; a wanderer actively seeking signs in the urban landscape to enable an understanding of the city as a product of society. Kracauer’s “flashes of reality” are reflected in Vrkljan’s comment that “often it’s just that flash, all white paper, and on it a trembling drawing of lines, paths. So sometimes we write down cities.”²⁵ For Vrkljan, we can see that the idea of “reality” is extended to acknowledge her interest in the agency of the written word; reality can be expressed and created through writing, but this also acknowledges the subjectivity and multiple interpretations of any one experience. As German scholar Almut Hille commented, in Vrkljan’s novel *Schattenberlin* [Shadow-Berlin] (1990), Vrkljan actively searches the city for the Berlin immortalized in the writings of “outsiders” such as Walter Benjamin, Alfred Döblin, and Marina Zwetajewa.²⁶ In uncovering the “realities” of these authors, Vrkljan would not only uncover lost experiences but also develop these experiences to incorporate into her own understanding of the city. Vrkljan, who was already established in television in Croatia, as well as a published translator and author, embarked on a new

journey to West Berlin in 1966, inspired by writings about the city and the lure of the unknown. Despite her gender, Vrkljan therefore neatly fitted the criteria of the *flâneur*; the outsider, the quiet observer, the foreigner in a new city that enabled a detached observation of West Berlin, and which was aided by the probing lens of the film camera.

During her time at the dffb, Vrkljan created three short films about the city of Berlin. The films are local explorations and excavations of stories from *Schattenberlin*, but also embody critical positions on the politically motivated dffb generation to which she belonged.²⁷ *Widmung für ein Haus* [Dedication to a House] (1966) is a homage to the former pleasure palace Haus Vaterland (1911-2) on Potsdamer Platz, which was damaged in 1943 during a bombing raid with only the walls left intact. Haus Vaterland was repeatedly returned to by Kracauer as an example of the rationalization of culture, with a *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] architecture that “presents a façade that hides nothing.”²⁸ In *Widmung für ein Haus*, Vrkljan looks for traces of the past in the old, abandoned ruin, which was located on the border between East and West Berlin, in no man’s land. Building on these themes, Vrkljan’s final degree film *Berlin* (1969): “The cities are built for you”, is another portrait of Berlin where Vrkljan reads facade inscriptions and includes a long sequence in a cemetery that ends with images of ruins being demolished.²⁹ The film then closes with various texts appearing over shots of Berlin’s *Freie Universität* buildings including “Solidarity with the 18 film mates!” and “Relegation causes revolution”, as well as images of a demonstration with posters of Mao and Lenin in Charlottenburg.³⁰ *Berlin* shows a politicization that coincides with the increasing activities of the ‘68 movement and emboldened by the dffb’s location at the center of many demonstrations along the key east-to-west route through the city.

It is, however, Vrkljan’s “quieter” films that provide an alternative conception and analysis of the films of the early dffb students. There is no doubt that Vrkljan was affected by the demonstrations that she saw around her, and yet her approach was to remove herself from the action and allow the city spaces to speak for themselves. As film historian Miriam Hansen commented, Kracauer and Benjamin attempted “to understand the history of the present, or the present as history, and to imagine different futures whose potentialities may

be buried in the past.”³¹ We can see echoes of this in Vrkljan’s approach to film, which was much like her approach to text; historically conscious and poetic. She commented in her novel *Berlinski rukopis* [Berlin Manuscript] (1988): “If we do not read the signs of the letter, the old books, the notes of the past, we will lose our memory, our history and our heritage. For all that is written down is for someone to come later.”³² It is clear, therefore that Vrkljan places a great deal of importance, not only on understanding the past for identity creation but also on the city-dwellers’ duty as custodians and interpreters for future generations. In counterpoint to her more radical film mates who were concerned with encouraging radical intervention in the present to construct a very particular future, Vrkljan’s approach is much more cautious. As an observer and “outsider”, she carefully uses the unique characteristics of the film lens to reveal avenues of inquiry that conflate past, present, and future understandings of the city to probe the potential identities of West Berlin.

The focus of this analysis, the film *Berlin unverkäuflich* [Berlin Not for Sale] (1967) was produced and directed by Vrkljan and the text was written and narrated by the Berlin-born author Benno Meyer-Wehlack. Meyer-Wehlack (1928-2014) published many books and radio plays and also worked as a lecturer in dramaturgy at the dffb between 1966-7, where he met Vrkljan. The couple later married and worked on many projects together, living between Zagreb and Berlin. In her novel, *Berlinski Rukopis* Vrkljan gives a sense of their relationship: “I walk through unfamiliar streets and listen to his stories,”³³ highlighting the connection Vrkljan makes between subjective, experiential interpretations and urban exploration. Much like Vrkljan, Meyer-Wehlack’s radio plays and writings combine the real with the lyrical. In the jury justification to his winning of the 1958 *Hörspielpreis* for his audio play *Die Versuchung* [Temptation] (1957), Meyer-Wehlack was praised for demonstrating “a new awareness of reality.”³⁴ The emphasis placed on uncovering “reality” not only corresponds to issues highlighted by Vertov, Kracauer, and Simmel but also demonstrates the collective post-fascist concern with being acutely attuned to the immediate environment. Also evidenced, is the similarity in Meyer-Wehlack and Vrkljan’s approaches to the city as

observers of the everyday to uncover hidden (hi)stories before they are lost, and it is this which will be advanced in the following analysis.

Berlin Not for Sale: Nature and Industry

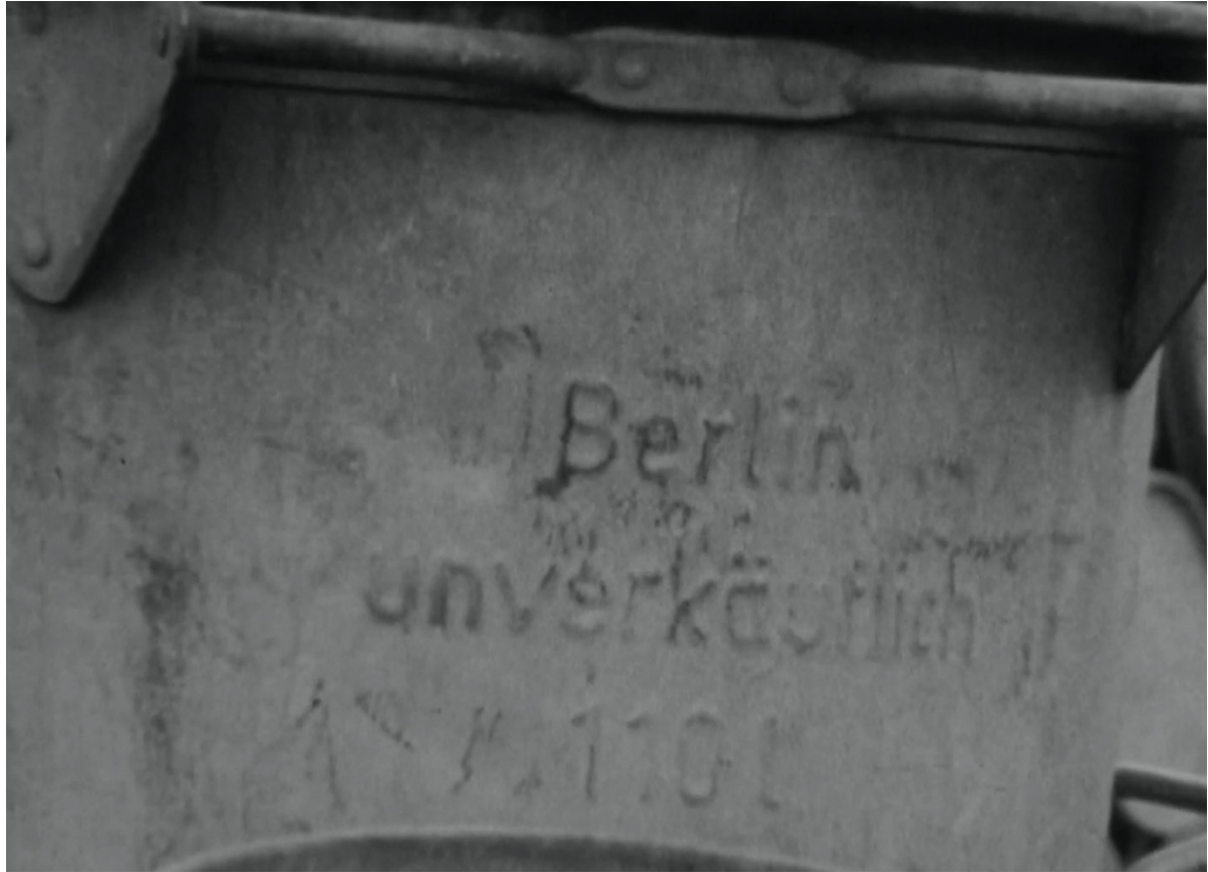


Figure 3: Opening frame of Irena Vrkljan's *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

Much like most student projects of the period, *Berlin unverkäuflich* is in black and white, the quality is grainy, and the contrast is weak. The film begins with its title, *Berlin unverkäuflich* [Berlin Not for Sale] stamped into what appears to be a communal rubbish bin (Fig. 3). The permanence of the title is striking in its defiance and we question the relevance of the text for 1960s Berlin, or for some unknown point in the past, which has a renewed and altered relevance in the present. “Berlin” as a singular entity no longer existed, just as “West Berlin” no longer exists today, and yet the conceptualization of “Berlin” remained a reality within the memory of its inhabitants. The concept of the enduring city that would be united, however, was slowly diminishing by this point in the 1960s as politicians, planners, and citizens turned their attention inwards, to activities on their own side of the Wall. The post-war construction of modernist housing blocks, motorways, and shopping malls at the expense of historic

districts in West Berlin was highly criticized as blatant examples of land speculation to benefit limited sectors of the population. Within this context, the phrase “Berlin not for sale” takes on a new and active meaning. Not only was the criticism directed at political nepotism, but also at the loss of history and community in the city in an attempt to deny the recent past. The reorientation of the city on the needs of the market was understood to leave the city-dweller disorientated and disengaged from reality. The bin belongs to Berlin and is not for sale, and by extension, Berlin itself belongs to Berliners and it too is not for sale, not to developers, nor to global politics. In using text etched into the surface of West Berlin as her title, rather than dictating meaning or making demands as was the case with her film mates, Vrkljan demonstrates the multitude of possible interpretations available that vary according to the knowledge of the viewer. This lack of dogmatism forces the audience to consider multiple viewpoints, the limitations of their knowledge, and the disorientation caused by removing text from context.



Figure 4: Film stills of nature. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

The next shots are of empty outdoor tables, of overgrown foliage, and nature in the city (Fig. 4). Vrkljan focuses on the details; the empty table fills the screen and untamed plants move in the wind in front of a weathervane at a macro scale. Rather than presenting the usual wide expanses, street scenes, skylines, and monuments more often associated with films about Berlin, parts of the city are fragmented and broken down. By placing attention on individual elements with no predetermined associations, Vrkljan attempts to make sense of the whole through the less well-known components of the city. In *Berlin*

unverkäuflich, Vrkljan actively practices Kracauer's approach to flânerie as a "reflective-empirical engagement" with contemporary reality.³⁵ Much like Benjamin, Kracauer was concerned with the gradual dismantling of architectural forms and ornamentation that "bore witness to the origins of the modern epoch."³⁶ This concept is expanded by Vrkljan in the dismantling, not just of architectural forms and ornamentation, but also of the city itself. In this way, Vrkljan is not favoring the heavily designed aspects of the city over the less ordered, or human activity over nature. The viewer is guided to the conclusion that the identity of the city can be found in its most mundane corners, and is even more apparent in these spaces as the *Stadtbild* [city image] has not been cemented in our imagination by symbols. The audience has no choice but to become actively involved in considering what constitutes the identity of Berlin.



Figure 5: Film stills showing S-Bahn. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

Vrkljan then shows children playing in the distance on the canal footpath, the camera pans and we watch an S-Bahn [city train] passing by as the narrator conjures up images of anglers by the side of the canal, and of days in August when blackberries grow in the

hedges. Accompanying images of S-Bahn (Fig. 5), Meyer-Wehlack recounts a story of an old man who was hit whilst crossing the tracks: “I’m trying to keep the man alive whilst waiting for the emergency services.” The overlaying and uncovering of past stories adapts Kracauer’s statement that “spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of these images can be deciphered, one finds the basis of social reality.”³⁷ The images captured in *Berlin unverkäuflich* are not just spatial but also intangible and vulnerable to distortion and loss. Significantly, Vrkljan has sought triggers for these images within the city, which unlock individual memories and demonstrate the importance of the everyday in its contribution to the experience and identity of the city.

Images of trains, for example, are a common trope in films about Berlin, which allude to the transience of place, inhabitants, and identity. As argued by architect Mick Kennedy and German scholar Karein Goertz, the S-Bahn became a “source of nostalgia” and a “metaphor for the post-war crisis and increasing alienation between the two Berlins” and yet provided a “surreal image of continuity amidst the destruction” in the city.³⁸ With some sections dating back to 1870, the S-Bahn recalled a past Berlin that was once complete, as well as one that was disrupted by the National Socialists and subsequent division of the city. Post-division, the use of truncated S-Bahn routes in West Berlin declined due to increased reliance on other modes of transport. S-Bahn revenue also went directly to the East German government and so there was a decline in its use for political reasons, which led to empty carriages stopping at deserted stations. The writer Uwe Johnson commented on the importance of the S-Bahn as a means to access the past: “The S-Bahn [...] keeps the city’s past in our memory”.³⁹ The empty train carriages, once a distinct place in the cityscape of Berlin where all levels of society intermingled, became emblematic of loneliness and isolation. Vrkljan’s search for symbols and triggers that provide windows into the past and present demonstrate how something as apparently commonplace as a public transport system became a prompt for wider reflection on the fate of Berlin and its citizens. In using the multiple images of S-Bahn passing by the deserted filming location, Vrkljan forces the viewer to contemplate all manner of ideas and reflections on the significance of the train

carriages, without priority. The story of the old man's death emotionally connects to wider feelings of loss within the city and is used as a trigger to explore individual, subjective, relationships with the spaces and places of Berlin.

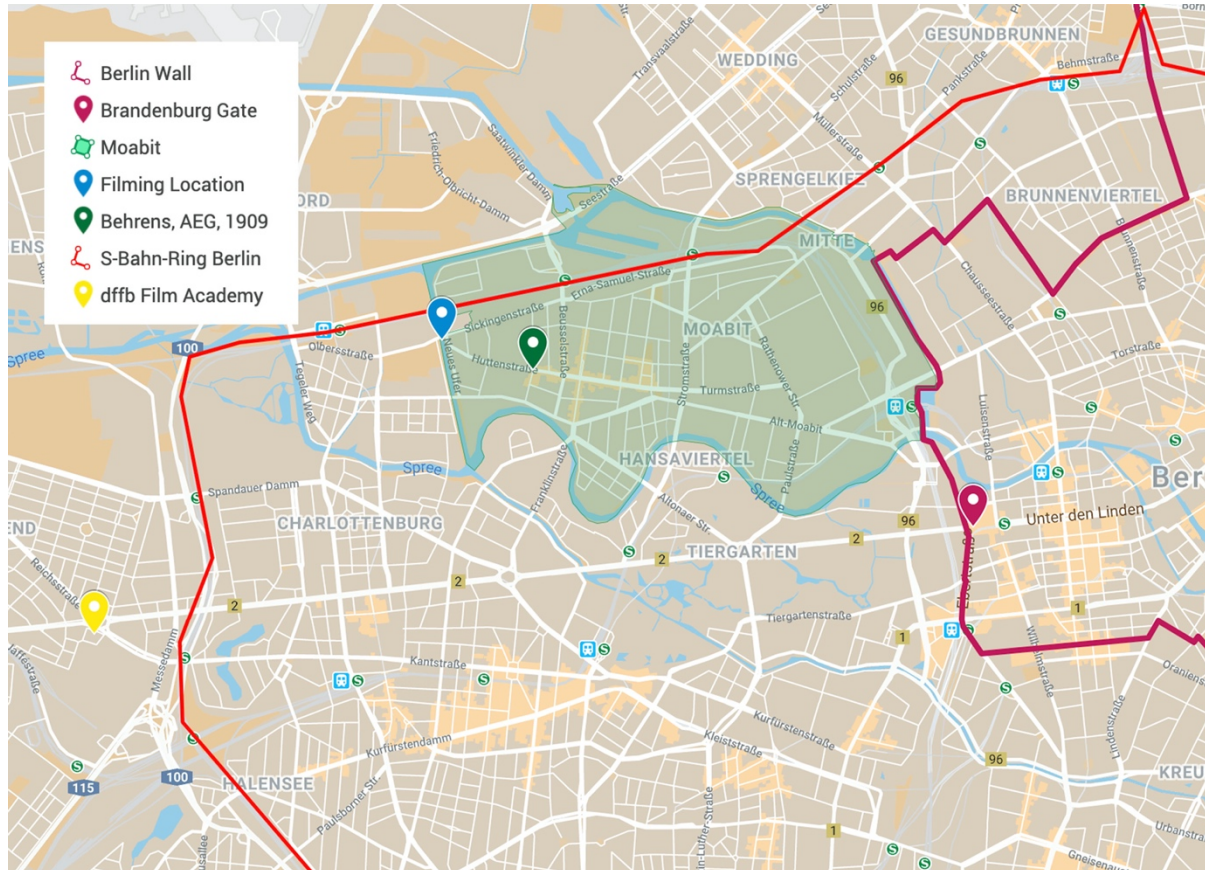


Figure 6: Map showing the Berlin Wall, the filming location, and the dffb. Map data © Google, 2020

The musings of the narrator about past events draw attention to the fact that the area is deserted, which is highlighted when we consider Vrkljan's choice of filming location (Fig. 6). Most of *Berlin unverkäuflich* was shot on the border of what is now Moabit (then Tiergarten) and Charlottenburg, in an area at the heart of Berlin's industrial production. The streets mentioned by the narrator are within walking distance of Peter Behren's modernist architectural industrial giant, the AEG Turbine Factory (1909-10). The district was itself an island in the larger island of West Berlin, bounded by the Berlin-Spandau Shipping Canal in the north and east, the Charlottenburg Canal to the west, and the River Spree to the south. The area is often omitted from guidebooks and has been branded as an "authentic" or "forgotten" area within Berlin. Traditionally working class, there is a mix of people, industries, and functions, which remain to the present day despite the slow encroachment of

gentrification from neighboring districts. The area is also famous for its prison, which held political prisoners during the National Socialist era. Due to its working-class nature, Moabit was also a stronghold for Communist cells during the interwar period, notably *Roter Beusselkiez* and *Rostockkiez*.

During the division of the city, Moabit formed part of the British Sector and the canal to its east became the border between East and West. The area mostly consists of standard Berlin tenements, where the government policy of removing facade details was actively practiced, giving the area a sterility and austerity that reflected the coldness and loss of frivolity in the post-war context. For critics, this policy of *Entstuckung* practiced between 1920-75, demonstrated another tangible distortion of the past. In reference to the nearby Kurfürstendamm, Kracauer commented that “many houses have had their ornaments stripped from them, which formed a kind of bridge to yesterday.”⁴⁰ Re-appropriating Kracauer’s concept, *Berlin unverkäuflich* does not explore Moabit’s residential areas, but rather the open spaces of the city, where the “bridge to yesterday” is more accessible due to the lack of government intervention in these areas. In doing so, Vrkljan is capturing these spaces and voices before they are lost to further urban planning policies. This desire to give voice to the voiceless, ties into the work of dffb filmmakers such as Helke Sander, Cristina Perincioli, and Holger Meins who used film to report on the often neglected concrete situation in the city; the plight of the working class, women, and the homeless. Vrkljan’s films differ in her use of the city spaces as triggers for lost voices, and notably, she allows the spaces to speak for themselves and encourages a variety of interpretations. The documentary films of other students are more dogmatic in their interpretation of events, often framed in revolutionary rhetoric, and in some instances, such as in Meins’s *Oskar Langenfeld* (1966), the dialogue of “real” participants was dictated.⁴¹



Figure 7: Film stills depicting nature in the city. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

Vrkljan's camera then pans to various views of nature; a view of the canal framed by lifeless boats, a flock of sparrows in a barren overgrown area of the city (Fig. 7). The audio of the film is dominated by sounds of the city; unmanipulated, although slightly distorted in the rudimentary recording equipment. The sound of the wind, birds, water, and rain dominate. We also hear noises from the factory, but they are infiltrating from a distance, retaining a sense of quiet in the immediate vicinity. In *Berlin unverkäuflich*, Vrkljan explores the agency of nature in demonstrating how parts of the city are slowly being reclaimed by natural and geological time, gradually negating the impact of humans. A concept that underpinned key urban planning proposals in the post-war period. For example, in Hans Scharoun's urban *Kollektivplan* (1946) and Hans Bernhard Reichow's designs for transport networks which focused on geological and biological foundations respectively. The suggestion made by these urban planners was that the immediate past, the past of the National Socialists, was a deplorable glitch in the long history of the city. By extension, Vrkljan is using the film camera to mitigate the dominance of the recent past in understandings of Berlin, whilst also circumnavigating the manipulation and conception of the past as a singular objective truth. By adding alternative voices, spaces, and interpretations, the history written by politicians, scholars, journalists, and protesters is questioned and becomes less restrictive as a result.

Brachen, or spaces within Berlin that have been left fallow, were created by the destruction during the War and in the subsequent division of the city. These newly founded

spaces became characteristic of, and integral to, the identity of Berlin as wild, disordered, alternative, ruined, empty, and burdened by the past.⁴² The abandoned spaces left in the city, in which people once lived, became tangible historic signifiers. It is through these places, as Vrkljan commented, that “research is possible, it is possible to penetrate the fabric of the city.”⁴³ In using the film lens to delve beneath the immediate surface of the city, Vrkljan uncovers pre-war Berlin through its “apertures”. An understanding echoed by geographer Sandra Jasper:

[*Brachen* are] apertures into cultural and ecological pasts and futures. Their presence reveals the lost city of prewar Berlin incorporated into the postwar city: pieces of rubble, neglected tracks, abandoned industrial spaces, and seeds of plants that are traces of wartime and colonial pasts.⁴⁴

The construction of the Berlin Wall further developed these enclaves with a drastically altered identity, causing a change in trajectory for the future of these areas. As the attention and focus moved towards more central and better-connected areas, many of these places were left to their own devices. It was within these spaces, where new and differing futures began to develop, often away from the watchful eye of the authorities or the direct intervention of protesting students. The spontaneous nature of these spaces meant that behavior was not pre-determined, allowing new and alternative identities to develop. The term for both history and story in German, *Geschichte*, better exemplifies Vrkljan's understanding of the past as created, embellished, distorted, and constantly re-worked through the agency of those who engage with it. In triggering memories, the fragmentation of the city allowed the individual to work through their own fragmented pasts and construct a fluid identity in the present and the future. The past seems to leak out of the voids and cracks within the city, and it is through this that these “abandoned” spaces became part of the identity of the city and its inhabitants.

Whilst the student movement conceived of the past as one dominated by “authoritarian personalities”, “control mechanisms” and blind adherence to authority, Vrkljan used the interaction between film and the city to uncover alternative and multiple interpretations. Vrkljan's choice of location, the deserted areas, and industrial heritage show

a more accessible past of an alternative Berlin. In the 1950s and 60s, films of urban Berlin recalled the heydays of the Weimar period, the destruction of Berlin during the War, or the construction of new apartments post-1945. Away from the commercialized city spaces, more possibilities and potentialities could be uncovered, in spaces that were not so strictly ordered and organized by the *Wirtschaftswunder* [economic miracle] of the 1950s. With the loss of the historic center of Berlin to the East, West Berlin reoriented itself around the Kurfürstendamm; a street that epitomized post-war commercialism and materialism. The constant sensory overload in the commercial spaces of the modern city, according to Kracauer, erased memory due to perpetual change and the removal of historic signifiers.⁴⁵ The result was a city-dweller lost and trapped in the constant present. Reconceived in Vrkljan's novel *Seide, Schere* [The Silk, The Shears] (1984), Vrkljan referred to the "threatening lack of history in the present day" which "overtakes us everywhere."⁴⁶ Rather than a perpetual present, Vrkljan cannot see any contemporary life in the city, as the loss of history in the cityscape meant that there were no foundations for the present. The location of *Berlin unverkäuflich*, away from traffic and people, in barren wastelands, allowed space for the city to offer up its own (hi)stories, to provide access to the present through the past.

Vrkljan wrote:

the city, disguised, is burying itself deeper and deeper. Its geography is that of the disappeared. The streets are often noisy with former steps. Berlin today – that's what remains as a shadow.⁴⁷

This quote highlights the continual change in the city, how its layers are gradually built-upon and erased. The slowness of Vrkljan's film camera encourages a deceleration as an antidote to the fast pace of the modern metropolis and the furor caused by protests taking place in the squares and streets of the city. Vrkljan's approach vastly differs from the fast-paced experiential and immersive films of the early dffb such as Thomas Gießer and Hans-Rüdiger Minow's *Der 2 Juni 1967* (1967), which documents the protests against the arrival of the Persian Shah in West Berlin and the subsequent violent confrontations with police. The contrasting slowness of *Berlin unverkäuflich*, with lingering shots and lack of focus on any particular activity, encourages contemplation of the urban environment, attuned to the

forgotten (hi)stories embedded in the built environment. In discovering lost aspects of the city's past, the city-dweller is able to situate oneself in the trajectory of history and move from a "blasé" to an active interaction with the city.

The urban stories that Vrkljan discovers become layers of her own story, and by extension those of the audience: "[Berlin is] just like a transparent layer of texts [...] that were written in it. 1920. 1933. And later."⁴⁸ Through her films and writing, Vrkljan explores the escape of the imagination, probing the idea that whilst the individual physically resides in objective reality, the world is navigated through the subjective mind. In contrast to the idea of a "collective spirit" that was propagated by the '68ers, it is difference and dispersal that Vrkljan celebrates rather than forcing solidarity to instigate change. As author Heinz Schwitzke commented "without glossing over everyday reality", the narrator Meyer-Wehlack also wanted to show that individuals "not only have their home in this miserable environment, but far more in a world of dreamlike freedom."⁴⁹ The couple, therefore, suggests an alternative way to navigate the contemporary issues, based on seeking authentic experiences and acknowledging the subjectivity of existence through a deeply historical and personal connection. In *Berlin'ski Rukopis*, for example, we discover an imaginary Berlin:

Is there a beginning? Doesn't that city of Berlin already begin in my mind, long before its streets, its names? Alexanderplatz, Kurfürstendamm, Reichstag? Is there not such a foreign world just united with pages of books that have been read, with sentences and descriptions from previously known places?⁵⁰

We can see that, as an "outsider," Vrkljan's own understanding of Berlin was influenced by imaginary explorations of the city through others. In her assimilation of Benjamin, Döblin, Kafka, and Zwetajewa, and the transfer of these imaginaries to film, Vrkljan worked through the significant role of the outsider on the development, reception, and identity of the city.

As noted by historian Belinda Davis, West Berlin was a city that attracted many young West Germans in the post-war years as it was the only city that was seen to represent their "world experience" and was, therefore, most attuned to their needs.⁵¹ In contrast, Vrkljan referred to her time in Berlin as frightening and isolating: "The gloom of the

city would soon have frightened me, the difficult loneliness of the people, the grumpy women in the stores, the dog's heart of the streets, the cemented future, that slow ice".⁵² Vrkljan evocatively describes the strangeness and unfamiliarity of the city to an immigrant in comparison to the sense of belonging experienced by the West Germans. It is this position that afforded Vrkljan an alternative gaze through which she studied the city and its inhabitants, and which she used as a tool to combat her isolation.

Vrkljan, therefore, explored Kracauer's assertion that "films tend to explore this texture of everyday life, whose composition varies according to place, people, and time. [...] They virtually make the world our home."⁵³ Using film to scrutinize her role in the formation of everyday life in West Berlin, Vrkljan returns to more "authentic" spaces in the city to allow her to examine the detachment of the outsider. This then allows Vrkljan to consider her own identity in a new city, but also the identity of West Berlin in its redefined role in the post-war world. What Vrkljan offers to the narratives of the early films of the dffb is how spaces of the city, less encumbered by preconceived connotations and away from the dogmatism of political protest, can be used to work through the identity of the individual and of the urban immigrant experience.

Expressions on the Surface of the City

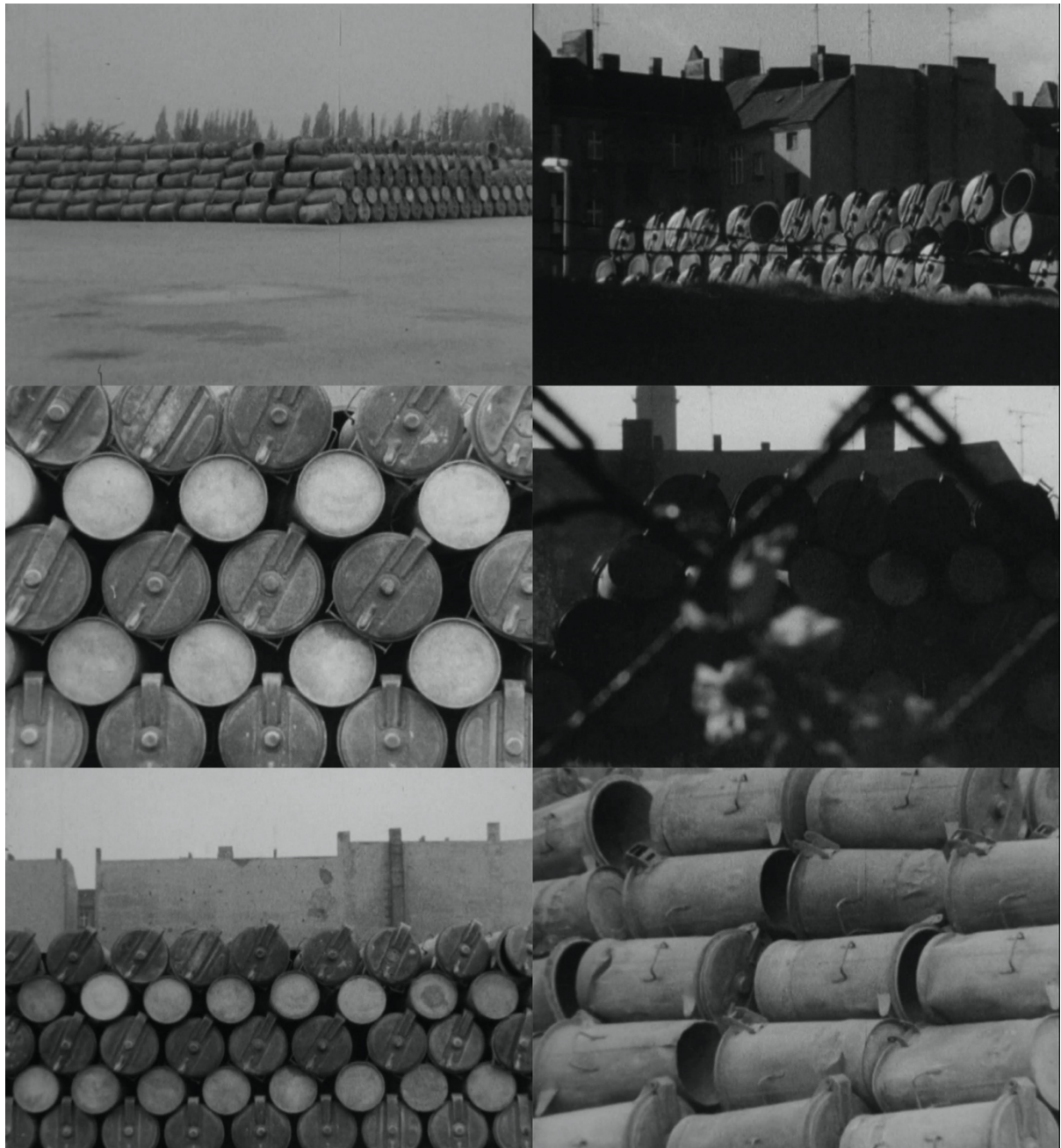


Figure 8: Film stills of empty rubbish bins. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

The camera pans to the site of the *BSR* [Berlin Sanitation Department] on Ilsenburger Straße, we see the building through meshed fencing, heightening the feeling that there are stories just out of reach, that there are obstacles to navigate before we can touch the real history of the place. The film frames static shots of rubbish bins stacked, one on top of another, in abstracted formations (Fig. 8). There is beauty in the banal, which corresponds to developments in art in the 1960s where “found art” was used to force inhabitants to reconsider their relationship with the spaces in the city through its re-appropriated objects.⁵⁴

Similarly, Vrkljan forces the viewer to contemplate the banal aspects of the fundamental operations of a city. Each bin represents a single home or a single tenement block within Berlin, and yet we see no human activity; all trucks are stationary, the piles of rubbish bins sit empty and redundant. A reflection of empty, redundant Berlin? A notion that contrasts significantly with the city's central location on the front line of the Cold War, demonstrating the conflicting poles of interpretation of the city's developing post-war identity.



Figure 9: Film stills of the industrial landscape. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

The camera then pans to other images of the industrial landscape (Fig. 9); two gas holders belonging to the GASAG company on Sickingenstraße situated in empty wasteland. We see two cranes moving on the skyline and smoke billows from the chimneys, which suggests that there are people at work despite the lack of human activity in the frame. The film camera probes the objective experience of the present by correlating physical distance with temporal distance in developing the sense that activity taking place on the horizon is occurring in the distant past. Finally, in our immediate vicinity, we see an old man walking down a path, away from the camera, framed with high meshed-wire fences overgrown with

foliage. The voiceover tells a story about Orson Welles being captured and killed; “The story cannot end otherwise.” There is a sadness in the statement, as though the story has a predestined ending, which questions the agency of the individual, not only within history at a larger scale but also within the city itself. The ’68 slogan that demanded a “right to the city” focused on asserting agency within city spaces. Vrkljan investigates the validity of this ideal and instead considers the inevitability of the city’s “concrete” future. Vrkljan’s experience of the city as “unfriendly” and “strange” is reflected in the emptiness of Moabit and questions the right of the city-dweller and “outsider” to assert ownership over spaces in the city. The seemingly inevitable death of the protagonist forces the viewer to critically consider the experience and agency of individuals and by extension women immigrants in West Berlin.



Figure 10: Stills from Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

We move to a shot of water dripping from the underside of a railway tunnel into the canal, a shot of nettles that are “centuries high”, and a close-up of the gas container (Fig. 10). The voiceover talks of music - “*das ist schön*” [that is nice] - and the audience attempts to make connections between the dialogue and the on-screen image. Which music is

referred to? The music of nature, the sound of the water dripping into the canal, or another distant story? By overlaying images, sounds, stories, and the interpretations and experiences of the viewer, Vrkljan's camera invites us to explore the city through our personal memories and connections. We see images of mist on the canal, boats in various stages of disuse, and an old man climbing onto a boat in the distance. It becomes clear that the stories recounted by the narrator contrast with the barren landscape of the images. In retelling stories that are not obviously connected to the landscape in the frame, there is a collective uncovering of the multitude of (hi)stories in these places. Regardless of whether the stories are true, the audience is shown examples of the rich histories that barren Berlin holds for those willing to explore. Vrkljan's camera actively looks for traces of these past stories in order to offer them for exploration in the present, and in doing so the viewer has to become an active participant in deciphering what is presented.

In their interpretations of Kracauer, Vrkljan and Meyer-Wehlack discover their ability to recognize the reality of Berlin through "the dreamlike images they narrate."⁵⁵ The experience of the city, for Kracauer and Benjamin, as noted by Hansen, "comes to include the ability to register and negotiate the effects of historical fragmentation and loss, of rupture and change."⁵⁶ Throughout *Berlin unverkäuflich*, Vrkljan navigates these fragmented histories and searches for a rediscovery of multiple realities. The voiceover discloses that he "can hear dialogues in these places." As Hille noted, in the words of flâneur Franz Hessel, Vrkljan searches for "*Gegenwartsleben*" [present-life] "in the text of the city, which is disguised, buried in between its houses and gardens, where it preserves the stories of those who had to leave it."⁵⁷ Whilst politicians constructed new modernist homes that denied the past and the protesting '68ers were intent on altering the present, Vrkljan was working with the film camera to unearth stories preserved in the city spaces to access the many future potentialities.

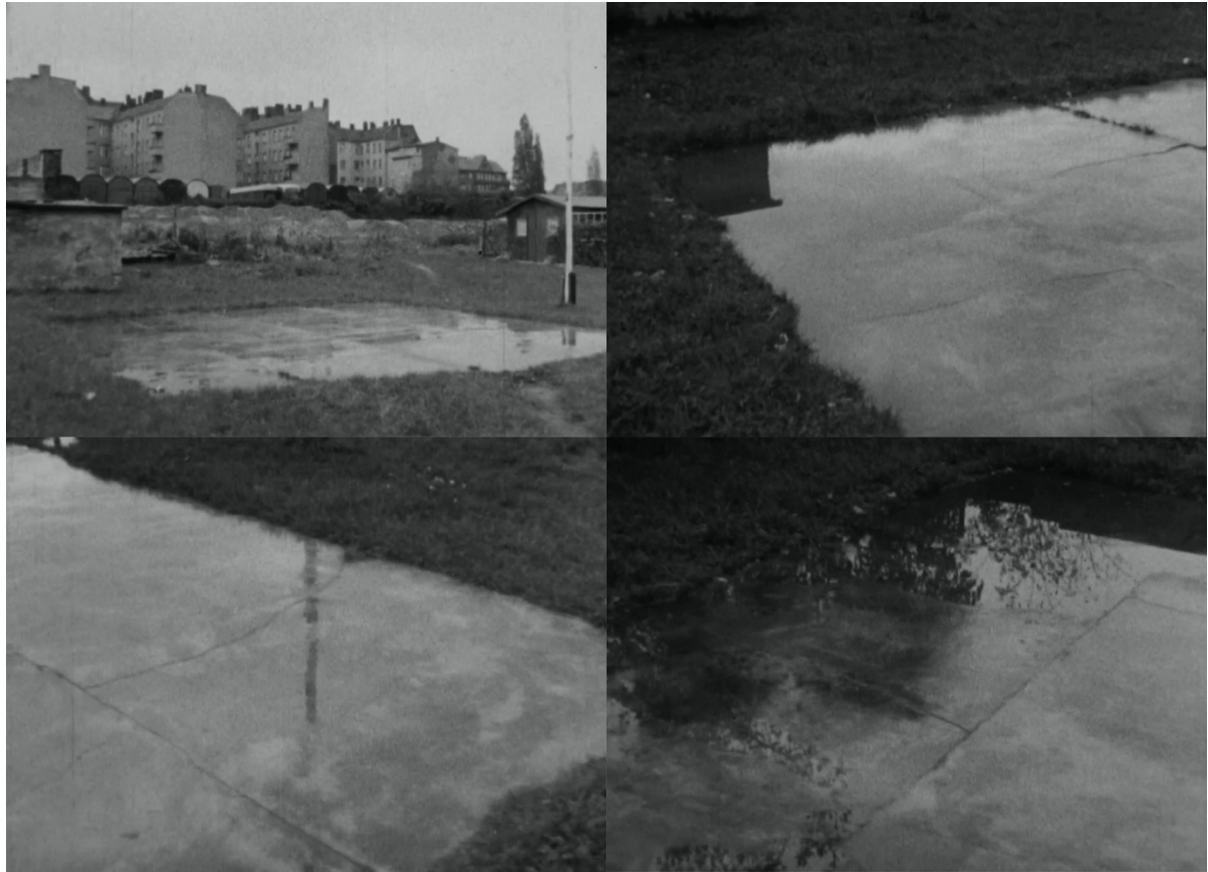


Figure 11: Film stills showing reflections. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

The clues in the cityscape, uncovered by the gaze of Vrkljan and her film camera, act as triggers for further exploration of the society that created them. In *The Mass Ornament* (1963), Kracauer stated “the position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from the analysis of its inconspicuous surface level expressions that form that epoch’s judgments about itself”.⁵⁸ Those people capable of conducting “surface investigation” in the “loneliness of the large cities” are representative of a new type of intellectuality, defined by Kracauer as *Die Wartenden* [those who wait].⁵⁹ Vrkljan’s camera tests this practice of waiting and watching; the camera pauses, almost static, the pans are slow and the shots linger. The only movement is caused by the weather. A sequence focuses on the changing reflections in puddles, which suggests the perpetually changing surface of the city (Fig. 11). It is this lingering and probing of the static camera which prompts the narrator’s memory: “here they once danced, there was an accordion, and a violin, but how many years ago was summer?” The idea of summer with its abundance and lack of want contrasts strongly with the on-screen images of gray post-war Berlin. The

narrator also plays with our understanding of time in implying that standard, regimented time does not exist in this place. The experience of Berlin, as Vrkljan stated in *Seide, Schere* is that “the past lives in us without chronology.”⁶⁰ Past, present, and future do not operate linearly in the disorder of post-war West Berlin. The suggestion is that the narrator is lost in the present and unsure of his place in the seasonal timeline, which a rediscovery of the past would rectify by providing orientation points. Contrary to the films of her fellow film students, which focus on directing the activities of the immediate present, Vrkljan uses the film camera to work through her experience of West Berlin as a city that incorporates a complex web of competing histories and presents. Vrkljan’s identification as the outsider provides her with the needed distance from the activities of the city to discover aspects of West Berlin open only to her because of her particular status within the city and the experiences that led her there.

Contested Emotions in the Post-War Context

Vrkljan’s film camera evokes the dislocation of the aimless flâneur/se purposely seeking authenticity in areas where the boundary between the real and the unreal is less pronounced. Over images of an abandoned playing field, the narrator states: “I don’t know, I think it’s incredibly sad here”, and then returns to the figure of Orson Welles: “Orson Welles crosses the fairground, coat collar turned up, how wonderfully bare and pronouncedly melancholic it is, how fantastically alone and abandoned.” He continues, “I want to enjoy my sadness, what else will I get from it?” Here, Vrkljan asks us to question the need to experience negative emotions, which feeds into discussions in the post-war world of mourning and exploration of the German complicity in the rise of fascism. In a text for a radio play, written during her time at the dffb, Vrkljan wrote:

You carry the stranger with you. You know, everyone I know is strangely unhappy here [in Berlin]. Out of a fear that I can hardly understand because it is inarticulate and somehow abstract. The professors are ancient. Not in years. But in how they speak.⁶¹

Vrkljan shared a seminar group with Thomas Mitscherlich and, perhaps in this way was introduced to the ideas and concepts of his parents, Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich,

who's quotations she used to illustrate her film *Berlin* (1969). The Mitscherlich's joint publication *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* [The Inability to Mourn] (1967) had a pronounced impact on analyses of German attitudes towards National Socialism in the post-war context. The couple argued that Germans were living in "unreality" to avoid guilt by "breaking all effective bridges to the immediate past."⁶² The frenetic rebuilding of Germany was seen as a distraction from the natural reaction of melancholia, and through which a true consideration of reality was denied. Kracauer argued that the streets and inhabitants remained largely invisible because "physical nature has been persistently veiled by ideologies."⁶³ The desire to break through these ideologies had a meaningful reception in the post-fascist era, which became a key contingent of the '68 generation who saw the continuation of fascism exemplified by the post-war denial of the past.

The desire to discover "reality" or "authenticity" linked to the concern that Germany had missed the indicators of National Socialism and had to remain vigilant in case of its resurgence. The ability of the film camera to identify that which could not be seen with the naked eye was a tool that could be incorporated into the armory of the alert and engaged city-dweller. Likewise, the desire professed by the narrator in *Berlin unverkäuflich* to enjoy his sadness is in direct counterpoint to the 1950s economic miracle in which citizens were continually distracted by superficial stimuli, commerce, and materialism, at the expense of experiencing genuine emotions. The narrator's assertion of agency reflects this when he states "there is no reason to play the hopeless and those steadily sliding downwards...I should hope that there is! That is my luxury. It rains when I want." Here, Meyer-Wehlack not only asserts his right to experience authentic reactions but also his right to choose when he does so.



Figure 12: Film stills showing decaying boats. Irena Vrkljan, *Berlin unverkäuflich* (West Berlin: dffb, 1967)

Continuing this sense of melancholy, the last sequence in *Berlin unverkäuflich* shows the decaying boats that litter the canal as remnants of one of the city's lesser-known pasts (Fig. 12). The static camera shots show broken planks, cobwebs, rusted machinery, peeling signage, debris piled up in a stern, a man bailing water, a young boy looks over the pier into the water, a barge starts to move, slowly and noisily towards the camera. The voiceover narrates:

these barges are decaying and sinking, they have had their day, the numbers and signs and names have been forgotten, they are no longer in books, they

are no longer mentioned, they can no longer be called upon [...] One day these nameless will begin to speak; of Potsdam, Fürstenwalde, Fangschleuse, of Keis, brown coal, scrap, boatmen, cities. From the water, in the dark, to the bottom, stories that no one has heard before, and then they will spread their big heavy wings, and fly away, to the country from which they came.

The narrator is actively mourning the loss of unknown stories in a city so dominated by a very particular and recent history. The spaces of the city become, in the words of Vrkljan a “museum of utopias of survival”, that which Hille referred to as a “shadow realm” where Vrkljan hears the sound of earlier movements in the city through the exposed layers and gaps within the fabric of Berlin.⁶⁴ The narrator states that “and all this misery and constantly changing shabbiness will not be there for long anyway. We cannot afford that. I know there could be so many new homes here, but let me be sad.” The fear highlighted in this quote is what history will be lost in new construction. The warnings in both Kafka and Benjamin were that the modern city was becoming hostile to the *flâneur*, and so the choice of the filming location, with its mix of people, functions, nature, and the urban indicates an attempt to seek out places that open paths to the past. Vrkljan actively undertook her urban explorations to discover and incorporate (hi)stories before they were lost to the land of new builds, whose glass and lack of ornamentation was termed “the enemy of secrets” by Walter Benjamin.⁶⁵ Through her films, Vrkljan reminded the city of the ruins on which it was building its future and provided the viewer with the time and space to contemplate their role in capturing and reorienting the identity of the city.

Conclusion

What can be concluded from this exploration of *Berlin unverkäuflich*, is that Vrkljan used film as an active tool to probe and unlock hidden (hi)stories of 1960's West Berlin. The unique position that immigrants to the city held, indicative of Vrkljan as the “outsider”, and the detached outlook necessitated by the *flâneur*, were combined with a fundamental consideration of identity. The identity of the individual was exposed, understood, mediated, conflicted, and accessed through an exploration of the city itself. The symbiotic relationship between the individual and city space was made accessible through the lens of the film camera. Vrkljan actively sought ways to respond to Kracauer's claim that “we cannot hope to

embrace reality unless we penetrate its lowest layers.”⁶⁶ In contrast to other films of the early dffb students, Vrkljan’s films show both resurrection and understanding of past events that are no longer visible in the cityscape, but where traces and memories are tangibly within reach of the active viewer.

In *Berlin unverkäuflich*, Vrkljan explores the lack of present in the city, and by extension, its unknown futures. In a city dominated by the ever-presence of a specific past, and with a fragmented present, what were the options for its future? Whilst the wider ’68 movement was concerned with the inherited social and political structures of the National Socialist period, Vrkljan excavated everyday (hi)stories to unlock the potential of intervening in the city’s future through more authentic engagement with the city’s realities. There was an inherent wariness of any form of dogma in the post-fascist period and yet often the political films of the dffb students and the more revolutionary factions of the ’68 movement followed this formulation of reactionary and domineering rhetoric. The more reformist participants of West Berlin’s ’68 diagnosed the current situation, discovered methods to uncover the city as it was and how it operated, suggesting that potential futures would arise democratically from the newly created social situation. Similarly reformist, Vrkljan promoted a sense of agency in the present, and various potential pasts and futures, and yet this was practiced away from the heat of the demonstrations and the busy shopping streets. Whilst clearly condemning the fascist period, Vrkljan keenly sensed that destroying all connections to the past for fear of connections to National Socialism would cause West Berliners to become dislocated from the urban trajectory of their city.

What Vrkljan’s approach demonstrates, aside from the active development and application of concepts of the *flâneuse*, is that Vrkljan’s past and identity afforded her the detachment needed to explore alternative realities of Berlin. The close-up framing and fragmentation of un-explored areas of the city and the slow and prolonged shots, present an urban West Berlin that differs drastically from the Berlin that we see in the rush of the student protest, in the commercial Kurfürstendamm, or working-class districts and factories.

Whilst '68ers reportedly reveled in the cold, harsh, gray Berlin as reflective of their experience of the contemporary condition and their desire to directly alter society, Vrkljan chose a different tact, one which explored the city spaces that were left quiet and thus able to offer shadowy histories without manipulation or distortion. The realities that only the film lens was capable of uncovering combined with the viewpoint of the "outsider" presented an image of a more diverse and "authentic" city through the experience of the everyday.

This analysis has sought to re-introduce Irena Vrkljan back into the discussions of film history and urban history in Berlin. The significance of Vrkljan's reinstatement, analysis of her approach, and contribution to the early years of the dffb is threefold; firstly, as one of only three women in the first cohort of students at the dffb, which also included Gerda Katharina Kramer (1946-2003) and Helke Sander (1937-), only the work of Sander has been explored in any depth.⁶⁷ The discussions of Sander's feminist films fit into a developing, and very necessary revisionist analysis of German film history to include those women's voices who actively engaged with feminist concerns. Whilst adding to the knowledge of the women filmmakers of the period, analyzing Vrkljan's work importantly includes an approach that deviates from the reactionary and rebellious conception of the sixties. Diversifying the knowledge of women's approaches can not only better conceptualize the fractious nature of the period in question but also reconceive the experience of post-war West Berlin according to a variety of narratives.

Secondly, as histories are dominated by the largest majority and the most powerful voices, Vrkljan demonstrates the observant voice of the immigrant and the woman filmmaker concerned with exploring the city to understand the relationship between urban spaces and their inhabitants. Davis argued that "politics made the space; activists "made" West Berlin; West Berlin in turn made the activists."⁶⁸ We can see this evidenced in Vrkljan's urban explorations, whereby the city is understood as a product of various pasts that hold the potential to help its inhabitants understand their place within its development. What Davis's quote does not highlight is the diversity of approaches, interpretations of the city, and identity of its inhabitants as demonstrated in the divergence of approaches at the early dffb. Vrkljan

adds but one voice to an extended diversification of the scholarship around the film school, the 1968 movement, and the cultural engagement with urban Berlin.

Thirdly, as a city that in 1910 the art historian Karl Scheffler commented is “condemned forever to become and never to be,”⁶⁹ an analysis of post-war Berlin through Irena Vrkljan’s work demonstrates part of the continuation of complex and multiple Berlin imaginaries that span the fields of film, urban planning, history, literature, sociology, and psychology. Berlin’s perpetual state of becoming is precisely what engages so many scholars in considering how the city can help formulate more complex and experiential understandings of cities as places of multiple urban imaginaries. These dialogues and discussions about the fate of Berlin are always intrinsically connected to its urban spaces, and yet the interdisciplinarity of Vrkljan’s encounters with the city can offer pointers in developing a more experiential and multi-faceted interaction and analysis of our urban condition.

The unique viewpoint afforded to the film lens, directed by a woman immigrant, and narrated by a Berliner, demonstrates an attempt to explore the non-linearity of time and the subjectivity of the city’s (hi)stories. The result displays the agency of the individual in developing the identity of the present, through uncovering and assimilating authentic pasts and multiple realities. The film lens, literary city imaginaries, and the gaze of the flâneuse provided Vrkljan with the tools to assert her agency in uncovering alternative Berlins, which could direct the trajectory of the city through a multi-perspectival, cautious, and engaged city-dweller.

Notes

- ¹ "Empfindliche Störung," *Der Spiegel*, March 2, 1970, 191. All translations by the author unless stated otherwise.
- ² Volker Pantenburg, "Die rote Fahne," in *1968 Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Studentenbewegung*, ed. Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2007), 200.
- ³ Passed on 30 May 1968, the *Notstandsgesetze* allowed the government additional powers in times of "crisis"; including natural disasters, wars, and uprisings. Opponents, including the student movement, saw the laws as a danger to democracy.
- ⁴ Fabian Tietke, "Dies- und Jenseits der Bilder - Film und Politik an der dffb 1966-1995," *dffb-archiv* (2019), <https://dffb-archiv.de/editorial/dies-jenseits-bilder-film-politik-dffb-1966-1995>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
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